



Bright-eyed Brown, *Heteronympha cordace*, Quarry St Reserve, Trentham 25 12 24. Photo: Euan Moore

Vale Richard Piesse

26.10.42 – 28.12.24

Richard Piesse died on 28th December 2024 in the Peter Macallum Hospital after his long battle with cancer. Richard joined the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club (CFNC) in 2001 but had been active in Central Victoria for many years before this through his membership of the Great Dividing Trail Association (GDTA), having managed the building of both the Lerderderg and Leanganook tracks of the GDT Network. This was recognised in 2013 when he won Bushwalking Victoria's Distinguished Service Award (Gold) for his role in advancing the development of recreational bushwalking in Victoria. He invariably wore his green GDT cap on field trips with this and other groups thereafter. He was active also in the Chewton Domain Society, leading walks from Castlemaine to the Monster

Meeting some years, and supporting the production of the Chewton Chat newsletter. He led many of the Friends of the Box-Ironbark Forests bush walks over the years.

On joining the CFNC, Richard was soon involved in its activities, working with Ern and Lesley Perkins and other members in the extensive program to establish quadrat-based surveys of the plants across Mt Alexander Shire. He became an enthusiastic advocate for the wildflowers that transform the region's Box Ironbark forests each Spring, leading many of the club's excursions in the area, especially within the Fryers Forest, and making lists of the plants identified along the way, pointing out the sites of nearby quadrat surveys. Richard joined the CFNC

committee in 2002, remaining as a member until 2021. During this time, successive Presidents included special mention of Richard's valuable contributions to the committee's work in their annual reports. For example, Rita Mills: "Richard Piesse comes up with some great suggestions for field trips, and is often the leader, which we all appreciate. He is also a great encourager and I have appreciated that very much."

In 2008 Richard contacted Beth Mellick, executive officer of the Wettenhall Foundation, seeking support for CNFC members to produce a local flora guide for Castlemaine, based on a guide he had seen for the plants of the Leigh Valley. The outcome was the invaluable colour brochure

"*Indigenous Plants of Castlemaine and surrounds*", launched at a packed meeting on 22nd July 2010, which has been an essential guide for so many of us when out in our local forests. Richard kept abreast of plant name changes and continued to feed this information to the committee as it produced a second and very recently, a third edition of this brochure.

A number of CFNC members and others who walked along bush tracks with Richard have written about what they valued and learnt from this man who had such a great knowledge and appreciation of the natural environment. Anne Perkins noted in particular Richard's active and frequent participation in the vegetation quadrat survey work, and the great support he had given to her parents Lesley and Ern in doing this work. "He really understood and supported the scientific value of regular monitoring." Geraldine Harris remembered Richard as "a dedicated bush walker and advocate for our local bush. His contribution as a club member was very special and I will miss the gentle support he offered whenever we explored the bush together."

Juliana Hurley also recalled how Richard "argued strongly for protection of our bush land and held strong views towards those who couldn't see or understand the significance of 'our scrub' and the subtle beauty of our forests". During long walks to define the route for the GDTA tracks, he sought to locate, identify and describe our local flora – habits that continued through his 23 years as a member of CFNC. He used his plant lists to identify updates to Ern Perkins' *Castlemaine District Plant List* and the *Castlemaine Flora* website. Juliana "was privileged to accompany him for many kms and owe him much to my increased and lifelong awareness and love of flora of our local bush".

Judy and Philip Hopley found Richard's "knowledge of the flora of the region extraordinary and spent many hours in the local bush



Richard Piesse on a *Grevillea oblecta* survey in Fryers Ridge NCR with the CFNC, 20 05 23, standing proudly by a Great Dividing Trail signpost and wearing his GDT cap.

Photo: Jenny Rolland

with him. He rarely failed to identify a plant and insisted on using their botanical rather than common names - a legacy from his work with Ern Perkins. When we struggled to remember the correct names, Richard would, mostly gently, set us straight - he was a wonderful mentor". If they sent a photograph to Richard for identification he would reply promptly and provide additional information such as where the species could be found elsewhere with detailed instructions about which track to take.

Many of us have similar memories, as well as of requests from Richard for GPS details if the plant had not been recorded previously where the photo was taken.

The balance between protecting human assets in the region from bushfires and protecting the

natural environment was a major concern for Richard. Peter remembers taking George Broadway and Richard to sites they identified where planned burns had been too hot, killing some important species and resulting in rapid dense regrowth that was soon a fire hazard. While Richard welcomed the recent improvement in consultation by Forest Fire Management with environment groups, he remained sceptical.

For over 20 years Richard volunteered on Fridays at the Visitor Information Centre in Mostyn Street, travelling from his home in Melbourne on an early train. Most Fridays one or more of his Castlemaine friends would call in to report on recent sightings or plan a trip to the bush. A common task was restocking the shelves with the multitude of brochures. Richard ensured that visitors were made aware of the detailed local maps, and of the many leaflets on nature walks and plants that had been prepared by Ern Perkins and other CFNC members over the years. We were always pleased when he was able to combine these visits with attending the CFNC monthly meetings and excursions. He spoke fondly of his family and was thrilled with his grandson's birding skills – while mainly focussed on plants, Richard also enjoyed the birdlife observed along the tracks.

Those of us who walked in the bush and learnt with Richard miss him terribly. Wildflower wanders will not be the same. He was a good friend to us and to his beloved Central Victorian bushland.

Thanks to those who contributed to the preparation of this tribute.

Peter Turner and Jenny Rolland

See "Coming Events" page for details of our gathering to remember Richard on Saturday 15th February, 3pm in the Castlemaine Botanical Gardens.

December Monthly Meeting Report

By Jenny Rolland

Once again, at our annual Members' Night held on Friday 13th December, we were enthralled by a wonderfully diverse range of short presentations by members on their nature highlights for the year. A snap-shot of these presentations and selection of photos follows.

Phee Broadway kicked off with an entertaining story of a Brush-tailed Possum's repeated attempts to inhabit her bird feeder "house", despite her discouragement, finally settling for the less disturbed area over her garage roller door – a great example of successfully "Living with Wildlife"!



A house fit for a Brush-tailed Possum? Photo: Phee Broadway

Lou Citroën was delighted when his "Tawnies" returned last September and successfully reared two chicks in the same fork of a Yellow Gum as before. Lou showed us his excellent dated sequence of photos capturing each step of the way, and shared a wealth of "interesting facts" about Tawny Frogmouths.

John Lewis's dog is very good at "pointing" out possums in the back garden at night, but this time when John shone his torch into the Cherry Plum tree to investigate, he found a lovely huddle of roosting Silvereyes (photo on back page). Probably 3 juveniles and 2 adults.

Geoff Harris showed us a video taken by his family of a juvenile Grey Butcherbird in a tree in the garden in Castlemaine, taking an Eastern Spinebill apart. A noteworthy observation, especially as the Grey Butcherbird is not commonly seen in this area.

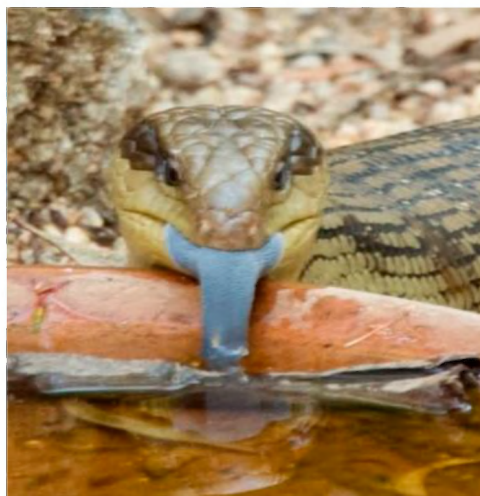
"Wildlife in the CBG and at Munro Court, Castlemaine" was the title of **Peter Turner's** presentation, demonstrating the terrific range of species on our doorsteps, whether bird, butterfly, moth, turtle, frog,

lizard, flying fox, hare or bug. He included one of his many wonderful photos of the Powerful Owls in the gardens as well as the Flying Fox population that now, fortunately for the favoured trees, has moved on. In his garden at Munro Court, he had waited patiently for the moment to capture the large blue tongue of the Blue Tongue Lizard as it lapped at the water-bowl on a warm day.

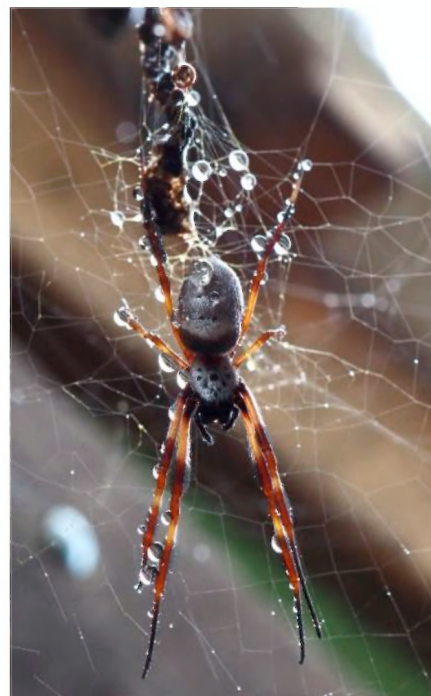
Jill Williams began by presenting an interesting overview of her iNaturalist observations for the year, revealing a large preponderance of insect species (43%) of which 16.8% were arachnids (spiders, scorpions, harvestmen, ticks and mites). She had observed spiders from 11 families! Jill then showed us some of her stunning photographs of spiders from each of these families, together with some fascinating spider facts.



28 October ... and baby #2 makes an appearance. Photo: Lou Citroën



Eastern Blue-tongue Lizard, *Tiliqua scincoides*, Munro Court.
Photo: Peter Turner



Golden Orb Weaver, *Trichonephila edulis*.
Photo: Jill Williams

My most amazing nature experience for the year was when I joined the Bird and Nature week on Christmas Island last September and was shown how to catch the endemic Goshawk for banding, recording of demographics and subsequent monitoring. Only a few hundred of these birds remain and their forests are under threat.

The researcher, Mark Holdsworth, had devised an ingenious strategy involving dragging a stuffed toy as a decoy "rat" slowly behind the vehicle to lure the bird out of the

forest to a nearby tree. Mark was then able to catch the bird by slowly raising a long fishing rod with a clip on the end which went around one leg to carefully bring the bird down for weighing and banding. The Christmas Island Goshawk is a lot more placid than ours!

The band can be read using binoculars so the bird doesn't have to be caught again. Protecting forest areas where the birds are found is helping to turn the decline in numbers around.

Geraldine Harris presented another thoughtful collection of "items of interest", including a timely and important distinction between the introduced and native St John's Wort.

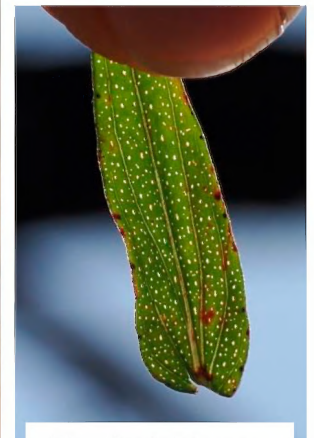
She also showed us photos of spectacular Red Beak Orchids (*Pyrorchis nigricans*). These orchids only flower after fire, and were seen on our last September Grampians weekend as we toured the Harris' property that had been burnt in the previous February fires.



Christmas Island Goshawk,
Tachypiza fasciata natalis.
Photo: Jenny Rolland



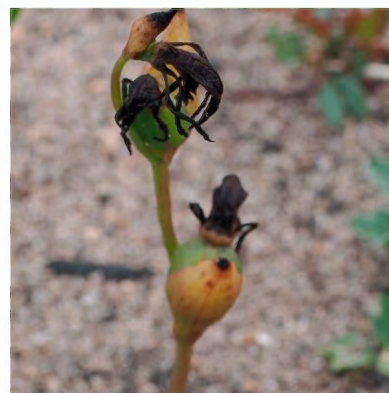
St John's Wort, *Hypericum perforatum*, is a weed!
Photos: Geraldine Harris



Glands visible on
leaves held to the
light



Red Beaks, *Pyrorchis nigricans*, are sometimes called Undertaker Orchids because they turn black when they are spent.
Photos: Geraldine Harris

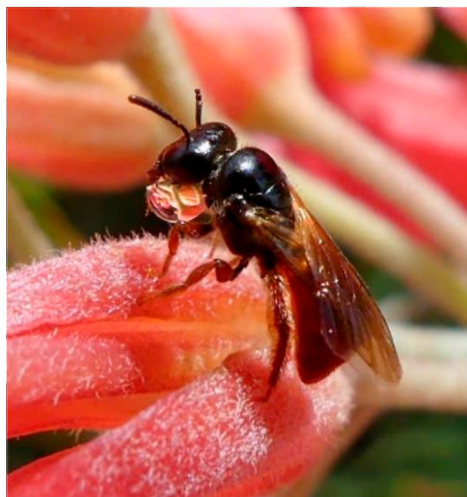


For a change of presentation style, **Cathrine Harboe-Ree** had prepared a slide show for us of the birds and scenery seen on her 4-day paddle-steamer trip along the Murray. Her photos were accompanied by a song composed by Cathrine ("Old Man Murray") and sung by her daughter to the

tune of "Old Man River". See separate article below.

Finally **Mez Woodward** stunned us with her wonderful photos of some small Reed Bees (*Exoneura* sp.) feeding on a Grevillea in her garden. She was able to photograph the bees holding a drop of nectar in their mouth-piece,

showing a lens-ball effect, i.e. an inverted reduced image of little baubles, just like water droplets on a spiderweb. Apparently this is "nectar concentrating behaviour", whereby the bee regurgitates a drop of nectar then manipulates it with its mouth parts to evaporate off excess liquid.



Reed Bee, *Exoneura* sp. Left, holding a drop of nectar in its crop; centre showing pollen on its hairy hind leg. Right: Rain drops on a spiderweb showing lens-ball effect similar to the nectar droplet. Photos: Mez Woodward

Pelicans, Parrots and Paddle-steamers

By Cathrine Harboe-Ree

In early September, Brian and I had a short holiday with a difference - we were passengers on the lovely old wood-fired paddle-steamer *Marion* on a journey on the Murray River from Mannum to Morgan in South Australia. *Marion* is one of the oldest in the world, if not the oldest, still operating as a passenger boat. It is lovingly maintained and operated by a dedicated group of volunteers.

This was a 4-day trip, slowly moving upstream past the beautiful limestone cliffs (part of the Pinnaroo Block) that have been colonised by many birds, especially Corellas and Cockatoos. In all we saw 45 different species of birds. The most common, by a long shot, were the pelicans, which accompanied us all along the

route. The rarest was a pair of Regent Parrots, which we only saw once, at dusk. The eastern subspecies of this bird is found in the Mallee and along the Murray, where we saw it. It is thought that there are only 1,500 breeding pairs in existence, so it was a treat to see them.

While we were moored at Swan Reach for the night we were joined by a representative from the Murray River International Dark Sky Reserve. This was initially an initiative of a landcare group but has now been embraced by local and State Government and many businesses. It covers more than 3,200 square kilometres and is Australia's first dark sky reserve. There are only 21 in the world.



A pelican coming into land.
Photo: Cathrine Harboe-Ree

60,000 Observations - 60,000 Interactions

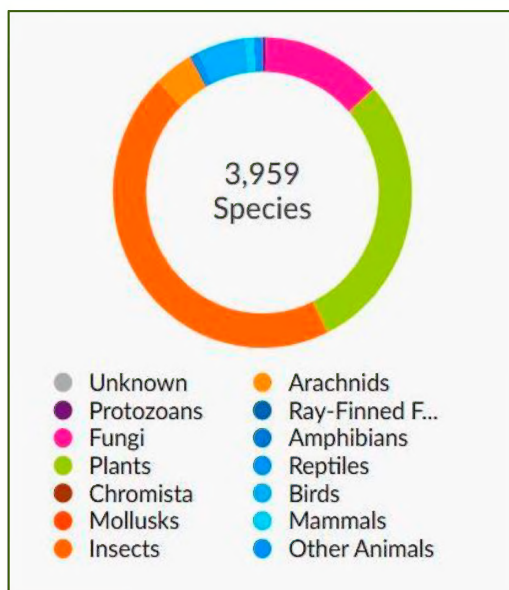
By Mez Woodward

During the evening of 25th January 2025, the number of observations recorded on iNaturalist under the *CFNC Mount Alexander Region Project* clocked over the impressive 60,000 milestone. This regional project was set up in late 2020 to capture a regional picture of all living species to contribute to biodiversity records and science. Automatically included are all observations, comprising photographs and sound recordings, that are uploaded to iNaturalist from a location within our region. Our region is defined as the Mount Alexander Shire and the eastern half of the Hepburn Shire.

What does 60,000 mean? It means 60,000 separate sightings or sound recordings of an Animal, Plant, Fungi (including Lichens), or Protozoan, and occasionally one from other kingdoms, to help our understanding of who lives where and when. These sightings have been identified so far into just short of 4,000 different species. Many are well known, but some are rare or threatened, and some are as yet unidentified, and could well be a species not yet known to science (see the moth in the photo on this page).

A shout out is due here to iNaturalist. It provides the platform, tools and numeric analysis to research observations recorded in our Project. For those unfamiliar, iNaturalist provides and curates a free online platform where anyone can be a citizen scientist and record, share and identify observations, contributing significantly to world biodiversity data.

The statistics also show 114 threatened or endangered species recorded in our region and the plant statistics reflect the gravity of the biodiversity challenge we face. Of the 18,100 observations, 2,412



of these are of 358 introduced species and 810 observations are of 74 threatened or endangered species.

On a positive note, 60,000 also means that on 60,000 occasions someone has noticed, studied and appreciated one of the millions of plants, creatures and other living beings with whom we share this region. Typically unseen and unvalued, all of them nonetheless play their role in the health of local and global ecosystems.

This Project is contributing to science and helping to nurture awareness, appreciation and understanding of biodiversity. A big thanks to all who have contributed one or hundreds of observations, from our stalwart locals to visitors, from Bioblitz supporters to organisations like the Entomological Society of Victoria who host events and excursions in our region. Let's keep up the good work.

To explore our project statistics further and learn more about the species in our area, go to: [CFNC Mt Alexander Region · iNaturalist](#)

A sample of the iNaturalist Project statistics:

Birds* - 8,276 observations of 205 species

Mammals* - 8,261 observations of 36 species

Insects - 16,100 observations of 1,763 species

Arachnids - 1,692 observations of 167 species

Fungi & lichens - 6,354 observations of 510 species

Reptiles - 607 observations of 30 species

Amphibians - 560 observations of 9 species

Plants - 18,100 observations of 1,159 plant species

* higher frequency of observations reflects the use of fixed cameras and sound recorders



An unnamed moth species!

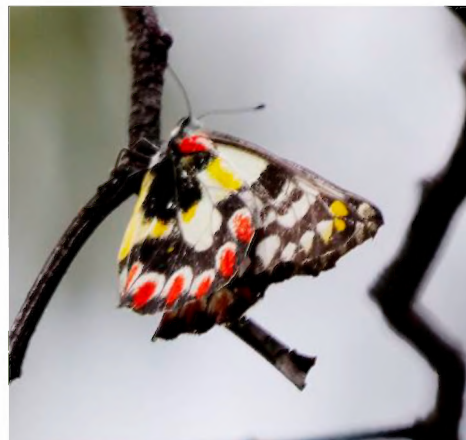
This moth turned up in mid-December 2024 on an evening when I had the moth light out. The photo was put on iNaturalist and has been identified as belonging to the genus *Condica* by one of the moth experts but has yet to be formally described and named.

Photo: Euan Moore.

January Observations



I finally lucked upon the elusive Brush Bronzewing on 13th January along Forest Ck. It flew to a branch and posed for long enough to get a few photos. There are always a few Common Bronzewings in the area, but this is the first time I have seen the UNcommon species. It was photographed by Euan and Jenny in 2020 in almost the same location (see CN September 2020).
Photo: Noel Young



A Red-spotted Jezabel seen in the Post Office Hill Reserve, Chewton on 10th January.
Photo: Noel Young



On hot days the dragonflies take refuge at our back door. A couple fly in when we open the door from the inside. I rescue most of them but alas not this one. The sated Huntsman is somewhere in my study.
Photo: Jill Williams



Robber Fly (Subfamily *Asilinae*) with catch in Hakea bush.
Photo: Jill Williams

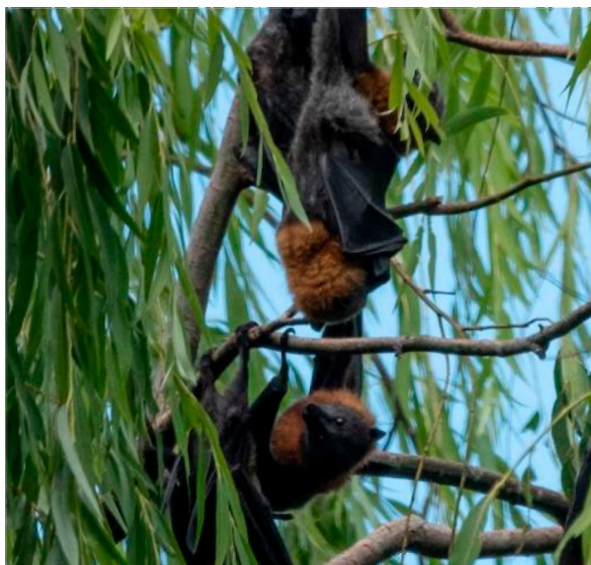


Cicada - Red-eyed Scratcher (Genus *Popplepsalta*). The male (right) has the red eyes, not the female (left).
Photos: Jill Williams.



A pair of Sulphur-crested Cockatoos were spotted working on a very high nest hollow along the Wewak track.
Photo: Peter Quinn.

January Observations (cont.)



Grey-headed Flying-Fox, *Pteropus poliocephalus*, at Malmsbury Botanic Gardens, 17th January 2025. A small colony near the lake which has been present since September 2024.

Photo: Euan Moore.



Comet C/2024 G3 (ATLAS) as seen from Castlemaine on 19/01/2025 at around 9:00pm. For about a week from 17th Jan it could be seen with the naked eye, cloud permitting, from about half an hour after sunset until it dropped below the horizon. Each evening it was higher in the sky which meant darker sky, but it was also fainter as it moved away from the sun.

Photo: Euan Moore.

From the Committee

*Happy New Year and welcome to another year of exploration and enjoyment
of our local flora and fauna!*

We are very excited about what looks to be a very stimulating program of events and activities. Details of coming events are included in this newsletter and on our website. Please make sure you are a subscriber to our website (from Home Page) in order to receive monthly email posts about activities and any last-minute changes.

Membership Fees for 2025 (due 1st April)

The Committee is recommending that membership fees are unchanged again this year. The following **motion** will be put to members at the February meeting: That membership fees for 2025 remain the same as for 2024: Single membership \$35, Family \$50, Pensioner/Student/Single Concession \$25, Family/Pensioner/Student/Concession \$30.

The CFNC ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING will be held on Friday 14th March at 7.30 pm before the usual monthly meeting observations and talk. All positions on the committee will be open, so you are encouraged to consider joining the committee. Members with a range of skills and interests are welcome. Members considering nominating for the committee are encouraged to contact the President or one of the committee members. Nomination forms are included with this newsletter and will be available at the February and March meetings.

Working Groups

Another rewarding way to become more involved with the club and to help with activities is to join one of the working groups we have for different projects. Current groups include Publications, Castlemaine Flora, Vegetation surveys, Bird surveys. We will also soon be forming a working group for our hosting of SEANA in spring 2026. Please contact our President or Secretary for more information on these projects and how you can get involved.

Cathrine Harboe-Ree, Secretary

News

New Design!

We are very grateful to graphic designer Jane Satchell for giving our newsletter a fresh look. The new format will also enable better quality display of our wonderful members' observation photos. Thank you Jane!

Good news!

With so much awful news around the world at present, Lou Citroën draws our attention to the happy news that the National Herbarium of New South Wales has achieved the mammoth task of digitising 1 million plant specimens for anyone to access, study or research.

The plants include rare species, Australian and Pacific flora, historical and type specimens, going back to specimens collected by Joseph Banks in 1770! Read about this exciting work and how to access the herbarium search portal:

<https://www.botanicgardens.org.au/our-science/our-collections/herbarium-collection>



Coming Events in February

Monthly Meeting: Friday 14th February, 7.30pm

Uniting Church Fellowship Room, Lyttleton St.

“Our native pollinators – beyond the honeybees”

Speaker: John Walter (Malmsbury Landcare)

The word “Pollinators” immediately conjures up images of honeybees in the mind of most people, however this presentation takes you beyond the honeybees with an up-close look at our native pollinators. Australia has 2000 species of native bee, but what about the impact of the flies, beetles, butterflies and moths. Let’s not forget the birds and mammals that also play their part. Noted local field naturalist, John Walter, will share his images and thoughts as he takes us *Beyond the Honeybees*.

Observations: Members and visitors are invited to share their interesting observations at the meeting. Please email any photos to illustrate your report as JPEG file(s) to Jill Williams (jilliwill33@gmail.com) by noon on the day of the meeting.

Remembering Richard Piesse - Saturday 15th February, 3pm

In place of our usual club excursion, we will join with the Visitor Information Centre to jointly host a gathering to remember Richard Piesse, who died on December 28th, 2024.

Please join us over afternoon tea to share memories and celebrate Richard’s life and contributions. Afterwards, there will be an option for a walk in the Castlemaine Botanical Gardens Nature Reserve, one of the many bushlands that has benefitted from Richard’s efforts.

Meet: Saturday February 15th, 3pm, Tea Rooms, Castlemaine Botanical Gardens.

Bring a small plate to share for afternoon tea. Tea and coffee will be provided.

Roadside Clean-up: Monday 17th February, 9am

Off to a clean start! Our first roadside clean-up for the year along our stretch of the Pyrenees Highway

- Meet at 9am near Tait’s Decorative Iron, corner of Willy Milly Rd and Pyrenees Highway.
- Garbage bags and safety vests supplied. Wear sturdy footwear and bring your own gloves and water.

Please contact Geoff Harris (mob 0418 392 183) if you can help with the clean-up.

Advance Notice

CFNC weekend at Wedderburn – 12-14 September, 2025

Following such a successful weekend last year at the Grampians, we will hold another weekend out of town this September. This year we will be based at Wedderburn with evening speakers and day excursions to nearby nature reserves. We are delighted that orchid expert Russell Stanley will join us, leading an orchid hunting excursion one day and giving an evening talk.

Accommodation options will include the local Motel, cabins and camping grounds. Further details will be given in the March Castlemaine Naturalist. Enquiries: Jenny Rolland 0400 565 092.

Mark your diaries!



Roosting Silvereyes. Photo: John Lewis

Program

Monthly meetings: 7.30pm, 2nd Friday of the month except for January.
Venue: Uniting Church Hall (UCH), Lyttleton Street, Castlemaine except during winter (June-August) when they are held by Zoom.

Members and visitors are invited to share their interesting observations at these meetings. Please email your photos as JPEG file(s) to Jill Williams (jilliwill33@gmail.com) by noon on the day of the meeting.

Excursions are usually held on the Saturday following the monthly meeting and leave from the northern end of the car park north of the Railway Goods Shed, Kennedy St. at 1.30pm unless stated otherwise.

See "Coming Events" page for more details about February events.

Fri 14th Feb, 7.30pm

Meeting (UCH) **Our native pollinators – beyond the honeybees**
 Speaker: John Walter (Malmsbury Landcare)

Sat 15th Feb, 3pm

Tea Rooms, Castlemaine Botanical Gardens

We remember Richard Piesse

A gathering to share memories of Richard and to celebrate his wonderful contribution to the Castlemaine community and natural environment.
All welcome.

Mon 17th Feb 9am. Roadside clean-up.

Fri 14th March, 7.30pm

Meeting (UCH)

AGM.

Learnings and leanings from two decades of Landcare

Speaker: Christine Kilmartin (Castlemaine Landcare Group)

Sat 15th March, 1.30pm

Excursion: A walk along Leanganook Track to view the CLG work rehabilitating this riparian strip

Leader: Christine Kilmartin

Visitors are welcome at club activities

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Membership

Includes the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist.
 (Membership forms on CFNC website)

Single \$35, Family \$50

Pensioner or student:

Single \$25, Family \$30

Newsletter: Castlemaine Naturalist

Email items: newsletter.cfnc@gmail.com

March edition deadline: **28th February**

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Secretary: Cathrine Harboe-Ree

Treasurer: Geoff Harris

Committee:

Lou Citroën

Jill Williams

Jenny Rolland

Noel Young

Peter Turner

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Jenny Rolland

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Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club.